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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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COME-00 LAB-04 SIL-01 /093 W
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P R 122048Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7969
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
USSOUTHCOM
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA
AMCONSUL CALI
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 4524

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CO
SUBJ: POLITICAL SUMMARIES: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY: THE PASSENGERS, INCLUDING FIVE AMERICANS, AND CREW OF A HIJACKED AVIANCA FLIGHT WERE RELEASED, AND THEIR ASSAILANTS WERE CAPTURED IN CURACAO. IN A SEPARATE INCIDENT, THE NICARAGUAN AMBASSADOR TO COLOMBIA WAS FREED UNHARMED AFTER BEING HELD BRIEFLY BY URBAN TERRORISTS SYMPATHETIC TO THE CAUSE OF NICARAGUA'S SANDINISTA FRONT. THE SUPREME COURT RULED UNCONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION INTENDED TO CREATE A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES CONTINUE THEIR CAMPAIGNING WITH AN EMPHASIS ON INTERNAL SECURITY. THE AMERICAN LAWYER REPRESENTING THE NEPHEW OF THE LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IN A POSSIBLE LAWSUIT INVOLVING CBS REPORTEDLY HAS INCLUDED PRESIDENTIAL ASSISTANT DR. PETER BOURNE AS A POTENTIAL DEFENDANT. APRIL FIGURES SHOW SOME PROGRESS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST INFLATION. VIOLENT REACTIONS
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IN SEVERAL CITIES TO A GOVERNMENT-AUTHORIZED INCREASE IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FARES BROUGHT OUT HEAVY SECURITY PATROLS WHICH SEEM TO BE CONTAINING THE DISORDERS, BUT LABOR UNREST THREATENS TO CONTINUE TO UNSETTLE THE SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

2. FIVE AMERICANS AMONG PASSENGERS OF HIJACKED PLANE.

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FIVE U.S. CITIZENS WERE AMONG THE 119 PASSENGERS AND CREW MEMBERS OF AN AVIANCA FLIGHT HIJACKED MAY 11 IN SANTA MARTA BY ONE, OR POSSIBLY TWO, ARMED MEN, APPARENTLY COLOMBIANS (BOGOTA 4493). THE HIJACKERS RELEASED SEVERAL PASSENGERS, INCLUDING THE FIVE AMERICANS, DURING STOPS IN CALI AND ARUBA, AND WERE FINALLY OVERCOME WITH THE HELP OF POLICE IN CURACAO. THE TWO GUNMEN SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN ACTING ON THEIR OWN AND HAD NOT MADE ANY CONCRETE RANSOM DEMANDS. ONE OF THE HI-JACKERS, THE PLANE'S FLIGHT ENGINEER, TWO CURACAO POLICEMEN, AND POSSIBLY ONE COLOMBIAN PASSENGER, REPORTEDLY WERE INJURED DURING THE INCIDENT.

3. NICARAGUAN AMBASSADOR KIDNAPPED, RELEASED.
FOUR EXTREMISTS CLAIMING MEMBERSHIP IN THE M-19 URBAN TER-RORIST MOVEMENT KIDNAPPED NICARAGUAN AMBASSADOR WILLIAM BARQUERO FROM HIS EMBASSY ON MAY 10. THE ASSAILANTS PAINTED ANTI-SOMOSA AND PRO-M-19 SLOGANS ON THE EMBASSY'S WALLS, CLAIMING SYMPATHY WITH NICARAGUA'S SANDINISTA FRONT, AND FLED WITH THE AMBASSADOR IN HIS OWN CAR. BARQUERO WAS RE-LEASED UNHARMED SOME TWO HOURS LATER. THE AUTHORITIES MAIN-TAIN THAT THE TERRORISTS WERE FRIGHTENED INTO FREEING THEIR CAPTIVE BY POLICE ACTION, BUT BARQUERO'S STATEMENT THAT HIS KIDNAPPERS HAD PLANNED HIS EARLY RELEASE AND PRIMARILY WERE SEEKING PUBLICITY IS MORE PLAUSIBLE. POLICE OFFICIALS IN BOGOTA REPORTEDLY HAVE DECIDED TO INCREASE THEIR VIGILANCE OF ALL DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS TO DISCOURAGE FURTHER TERRORIST
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ACTS.

4. SUPREME COURT SINKS CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY.
IN A CONTROVERSIAL DECISION, THE SUPREME COURT RULED UNCON-STITUTIONAL THE LEGISLATION WHICH WOULD HAVE CREATED A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION WITH REGARD TO JUDICIAL REFORM AND ADMINISTRATION REORGANIZATION OF THE DEPARTMENTS (STATES) AND MUNICIPALITIES. CRITICS CHARGED THAT THE DECISION WAS A POLITICAL ONE, INFLUENCED BY THE PROBABILITY THAT THE LIBERALS WOULD HAVE HAD A ONE-VOTE MAJORITY IN THE ASSEMBLY BECAUSE OF THE ELECTORAL MECHANISM SET FORTH IN THE LEGISLATION. THE SEGMENT OF THE BILL WHICH SET THE DATES FOR CONGRESSIONAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ON FEBRUARY 26 AND JUNE 4, RESPECTIVELY, WAS ALLOWED TO STAND, SINCE THAT PROVISION REQUIRED ONLY SIMPLE LEGIS-LATIVE HANDLING, NOT INVOLVING CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM, WHICH THE BILL'S PASSAGE FULFILLED. COMMENT: THE COURT'S RULING DEALT A MAJOR BLOW TO PRESIDENT LOPEZ' PRESTIGE SINCE THE ASSEMBLY WAS HIS PROPOSAL, IN WHICH HE CHARACTERISTICALLY ATTEMPTED TO BYPASS THE CONGRESS, AS HE DID WITH THE OTHER MAJOR ENDEAVOR OF HIS ADMINISTRATION, THE 1974 FISCAL REFORM. THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WAS ALSO TO ASSURE LOPEZ' PLACE

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IN HISTORY. HE EXPECTED TO PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN ITS WORK
AS AN EX-PRESIDENT AND THEREFORE EX OFICIO MEMBER DURING
THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION. THE URGENTLY NEEDED REFORMS WHICH
THE ASSEMBLY WAS TO ENACT (THE USG WAS INTERESTED IN JUDICIAL
REFORMS IN CONNECTION WITH NARCOTICS INTERDICTION AND IN-
TERNAL SECURITY) MUST NOW BE UNDERTAKEN BY THE NEW CONGRESS
TO BE CONVENED IN JULY, WHERE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM REQUIRES
TWO YEARS FOR PASSAGE.

5. CANDIDATES ADDRESS ISSUE OF SECURITY.
IN RESPONSE TO WIDESPREAD PUBLIC CONCERN OVER SECURITY,
THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES HAVE FOCUSSED ON THIS ISSUE
DURING RECENT SPEECHES. ON THE HEELS OF STATEMENTS BY CON-
SERVATIVE CANDIDATE BETANCUR THAT HE WOULD REFORM THE JUDICIARY
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THROUGH CONGRESS AND TAKE REPRESSIVE STEPS AGAINST CRIME,
LIBERAL CANDIDATE TURBAY PROMISED AN ALL-OUT FIGHT AGAINST

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BOGOTA 4524

INSECURITY, WHILE RESPECTING LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL SAFE-

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GUARDS. HE UNVEILED A SECURITY "PACKAGE" WHICH WOULD ADDRESS SOME OF THE ROOT CAUSES OF CRIME AND WHICH INCLUDED MEASURES TO UPGRADE THE EFFECTIVENESS AND MORALE OF THE POLICE. INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE RETIRED GENERAL VALENCIA TOVAR'S PRONOUNCEMENTS ON SECURITY DREW CHARGES BY EX-PRESIDENT ALBERTO LLERAS, TURBAY'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS SUPPORTER, THAT VALENCIA'S PROPOSALS CONSTITUTED "INCIPIENT FASCISM". COMMENT: NEITHER VALENCIA NOR HIS PROPOSALS COULD REASONABLY BE DESCRIBED AS FASCIST. LLERAS' AND OTHER SIMILAR ATTACKS ON THE GENERAL ARE PROBABLY MORE A REFLECTION OF CONCERN THAT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF LIBERALS AND OTHERS MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO VOTE FOR THE GENERAL, WHO HAS APPEARED TO GOOD ADVANTAGE IN HIS TELEVISION SPEECHES.

6. LAWYER FOR TURBAY'S NEPHEW CLARIFIES POSSIBLE CBS SUIT.
THE AMERICAN LAWYER REPRESENTING ANIBAL TURBAY, NEPHEW OF THE LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, IN A POSSIBLE LAWSUIT
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PROMPTED BY ALLEGATIONS IN A CBS TELEVISION PROGRAM COMMENTED FURTHER ON THE LEGAL ACTION WHICH HE MIGHT PURSUE (BOGOTA 4226). DONALD ISENBERG REPORTEDLY CLAIMED THAT THE PRESS HAD MISINTERPRETED HIS EARLIER REMARKS; AND THAT THE USG COULD NOT BE INCLUDED IN THE SUIT, ALTHOUGH PRESIDENTIAL ASSISTANT DR. PETER BOURNE MIGHT BE. COMMENT: TURBAY'S DETERMINATION IN CONTINUING THE SUIT STILL IS QUESTIONABLE, ESPECIALLY SHOULD IT REQUIRE HIS RETURNING TO THE U.S. TO TESTIFY.

7. PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN FIGHT AGAINST INFLATION.
THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX FOR WORKERS INCREASED BY 1.7 PERCENT AND FOR EMPLOYEES BY 1.4 PERCENT DURING THE MONTH OF APRIL. THE PRICE CHANGES FOR THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS OF THE YEAR WERE 7.4 PERCENT AND 7.9 PERCENT. THE MONTHLY FIGURE SEASONALLY ADJUSTS TO AN ANNUAL RATE OF 11 PERCENT, AND FOR THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS TO AN ANNUAL RATE OF 15 PERCENT. PRICE BEHAVIOR IN THE MONTH OF APRIL IS HISTORICALLY ERRATIC AND NOT A GOOD PREDICTOR, BUT THE PRICE CHANGES DURING THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS ARE CONSISTENT WITH AN INFLATION RATE FOR THE YEAR OF LESS THAN 20 PERCENT.

8. VIOLENT DEMONSTRATORS PROTEST FARE INCREASES; LABOR UNHAPPY.
VIOLENT DEMONSTRATORS, MOSTLY STUDENTS, USED ROCKS AND MOLOTOV COCKTAILS TO VENT THEIR ANGER IN SEVERAL CITIES OVER A GOVERNMENT-AUTHORIZED INCREASE IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FARES (BOGOTA 4429). HEAVY POLICE AND ARMY PATROLS ARE CONTAINING THE VIOLENCE WHICH BEGAN MAY 8 AND HAS CONTINUED FOR FOUR NIGHTS. SEVERAL LABOR UNIONS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE UNEASINESS BY THREATENING TO STRIKE IF THEIR

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DEMANDS, GENERALLY FOR HIGHER PAY, ARE NOT MET. BUS DRIVERS
VOTED TO HALT SERVICES FOR 24 HOURS ON MAY 14, AND SEVERAL
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GOVERNMENT WORKERS UNIONS ARE CONSIDERING A STRIKE FOR THE
SAME WEEK. ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, ROBERTO PRADILLA, A WEALTHY
BUSINESSMAN KIDNAPPED LAST DECEMBER, WAS RELEASED AFTER HIS
FAMILY PAID A REPORTED FIVE MILLION PESO RANSOM. COMMENT:
THE GOVERNMENT HAS SHOWN NO SIGN OF WEAKENING ON THE TRAN-
SPORTATION FARE INCREASE, AND SEEMS CONFIDENT THAT IT CAN
CONTROL THE LIMITED, THOUGH NUMEROUS, ACTS OF VIOLENCE.
IT HAS BEEN MORE FLEXIBLE WITH SOME OF THE STRATEGIC LABOR
UNIONS (SUCH AS THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS WORKERS), AND SHOULD
BE ABLE TO OVERCOME THE MOST SALIENT PROBLEMS IN TIME TO
ASSURE AN ORDERLY PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ON JUNE 4. ASENCIO

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